



Snake River Headwaters

DRAFT MANAGEMENT CONCEPT SUMMARY REPORT

August 25, 2011



OVERVIEW

This report summarizes ideas for a range of appropriate management concept options that could be considered for the Bridger-Teton National Forest's portions of the Snake River Headwaters. Public input received on these draft concepts will help guide the development of a proposed action to be brought forward into the NEPA process. It is expected that the proposed action will combine elements from each of the management concepts as currently described to form one comprehensive proposed action.

The concepts brought forward in this draft report are based on the previously posted Outstandingly Remarkable Values report, public input received from that and other outreach efforts, and guidance from the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

GOALS

The overall goal of the Snake River Headwaters Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP) for the Bridger-Teton National Forest is *to protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable values, free-flow condition, and water quality for the designated rivers, leaving them unimpaired for future generations*. More specifically, the goals of this plan are to:

Goal One Promote the rivers' natural hydrological processes, channel form and function, and ability to shape the landscape. Reduce impediments to free flow, ensure sufficient flows to protect and enhance outstandingly remarkable values, and ensure the maintenance of water quality at the highest possible level.

Goal Two Protect and enhance the natural function of riparian areas, wetlands, floodplains and adjacent uplands, including native ecosystem processes and natural levels of diversity, complexity, and resiliency.

Goal Three Protect and enhance cultural resources as important links to the human history of the river corridors including historical and archeological sites, cultural landscapes, and ethnographic resources.

Goal Four Provide a diversity of opportunities and settings for visitors of varying abilities to experience, learn about, and have a direct connection with the rivers and their special values. Provide high-quality visitor opportunities while protecting and enhancing river values now and into the future.

Goal Five Allow for multiple land uses and associated developments, consistent with each river segment's classification, that support the protection and enhancement of river values.

SCOPE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE RIVER MANAGEMENT PLAN

Congress requires that managing agencies develop a Comprehensive River Management Plan for designated rivers in the Wild and Scenic system. The CRMP will include the following:

- Free flow & Water Quality: provide guidance for protection of the rivers' free-flowing condition in keeping with Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and preserving water quality.
- Outstandingly Remarkable Values: clearly describe the rivers "outstandingly remarkable values," which are the river-related or river dependent, and unique, rare, or exemplary characteristics that made these river eligible for inclusion in the national wild and scenic rivers system;
- River Boundaries: document river boundaries and define segment classifications (as wild, scenic, or recreational);
- User Capacity: establish user capacity thresholds , establishing the kinds and amounts of visitor use.

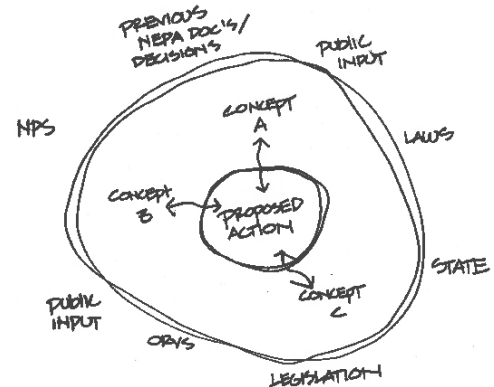
The CRMP will also include detailed descriptions of each river segment, goals, desired conditions and standards for each river segment. The direction in this plan will be incorporated into the BTNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) through amendment.

Jurisdiction over private land within the river corridors remains under the control of local government and the land development regulations that those entities utilize. The plan does not include authority to manage or acquire private land and does not affect any existing water rights.



MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OR THEMES

Three draft concept statements (see below) have been described. The purpose of developing concept statements was to create a framework for exploring future management options. It is expected that, through review, elements of these three concepts will be combined into a proposed action, potentially with different concepts most prevalent in various locations across the Headwaters system due to the diversity of river qualities. The graphic to the right represents one simplified way to visualize the management concepts and how they relate to each other. The proposed action will need to group the designated segments into a manageable number of zones by describing the Desired Future Condition of each group, and then specifying what—if any—limits on activities will be incorporated in each zone.



Some areas within the Snake River Headwaters already have clear protective standards, such as those within the Teton and Gros Ventre Wilderness Areas, and the Snake River Canyon. These will likely carry over into the CRMP. Other areas—the Buffalo Fork, lower Granite Creek, Hoback Canyon, for example—may need further clarification regarding how they should be managed.

A. Highlighting Ecological Integrity

This strategy emphasizes maintaining high water quality, free-flow conditions, hydrologic function, and connectivity. Management actions that allow natural processes to predominate would be encouraged. Anthropogenic influences are generally minimized. New recreational activities would be considered if resource-based and consistent with the protection and enhancement of river values. Visitor uses must adapt to changing natural conditions, such as re-braiding river channels, fluctuating water levels, seasons, or protections for sensitive habitats and nesting areas. Conditions and recreation experiences move toward the primitive, wild and undeveloped. Natural and cultural resource preservation is prioritized before visitor use and development. There would be less signage in this concept and onsite cultural resource interpretation is minimized. Management would seek opportunities to address impacts associated with existing multiple uses in a way to maximize protection of ORVs, free-flows and water quality.

B. Retaining Management Flexibility

The legacy of the Snake River Headwaters includes many and varied benefits to human communities over thousands of years, from travel ways, shelter and sustenance, to artistic and spiritual inspiration, and connections across communities. These benefits have been sustained in the face of technological, cultural and environmental changes. Traditional relationships among people and landscapes produced highly valued forms of knowledge and partnerships among natural resource agencies, tribal and community representatives, local businesses and regional organizations. These kinds of knowledge and partnerships can and must help protect and enhance the Snake River Headwaters.

In these times of increasing uncertainties, adaptation and resilience will be promoted through retention of management flexibility. Fish and wildlife management will be balanced with land uses, such as recreation and facility development, irrigation, timber harvest, grazing and mining, which support our

local economies while protecting identified river values, free-flow and water quality. Interpretive opportunities will be offered to inform the public about the range of activities occurring in the WSR corridor and how these activities protect and enhance the variety of river values into the future.

C. Connecting People to Diverse Recreational Opportunities

Visitor and community connections with natural, cultural, recreational and scenic elements are emphasized through interpretation, education and stewardship. A wide range of recreational and educational experiences are encouraged, including potential expansion of guided services as identified by needs assessment. Managers promote understanding, enjoyment, preservation and health to invigorate the human spirit and create lasting memories. Visitor opportunities would be relevant to diverse populations now and in the future. Improved access and facilities would provide for a larger diversity of recreational opportunities. Information encourages users to explore opportunities across the full system. Cultural resource specialists focus on education rather than surveys. Non-recreation developments would be managed to not conflict with recreational opportunities. Flow and water quality are managed to support recreational uses.

NEXT STEPS

Following public and agency input on this report, it is expected that these three concepts will be combined into one proposed action. The proposed action will describe the desired future conditions for each river segment, including standards and guidelines to be brought forward for public review as a Forest Plan Amendment.